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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [TBIO](#) [EAGR](#) [GR](#) [BIOTECH](#)

SUBJECT: GREECE DEFIES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION; HARDENS
STANCE AGAINST GMOS

11. (C) Summary. On January 30th, Greece's Deputy Agriculture Minister Alexandros Kondos signed a ministerial decision to continue and expand the ban on 17 strains of the MON810 seed corn family to 31 strains. Kondos' decision continues Greece's lone defiance as a member of the EU on biotech product and directly contradicts the EU Commission's January 10th order for Greece to lift its ban on biotech corn seed. While not out of step with the overall EU member opposition to biotech varieties in Europe, Kondos' recent action is emblematic of the particularly virulent strain of anti-GMO activity and public opinion in Greece. End Summary.

Background: The Ongoing Battle

12. (C) Over the past decade, the market for U.S. seed product in Greece has lost over 55% of its market share from 18 million USD in 1995 to 8 million USD in 2005. The loss of this market is a function of the efforts of broader EU anti-GMO activity via NGOs and various EU representatives as well as focused domestic agricultural protectionism by members of Greek Parliament.

13. (C) The EU Commission's January 10th order for Greece to lift its 2004 ban on the 17 varieties of MON810 type corn seed represented a shot across the bow of Greek agriculture policy, and as of yet, Greece has not altered its course. In a largely symbolic response to this order, the GoG is now expanding the ban to an additional 14 variants of MON810 seed, citing "scientific evidence (that) confirms that the cultivation of maize poses an immediate environmental risk." Post's contacts with the Ministry of Agriculture however, were unaware of any such research or evidence regarding the MON810 seed family.

Coexistence

14. (C) EU coexistence policy on biotech crops has proven to be ambiguous and allows member countries to use its implementation as an effective delaying tactic by instituting a complex web of laws, regulations, and penalties for those who chose to utilize biotech varieties. To this end, it is widely believed that Greece will adopt Italy's methodology for coexistence as they await further action from Brussels on their continued resistance to MON810 corn seed. The current tactic of expanding their unilateral ban to 31 varieties of MON810 corn seed will help delay EU efforts to enforce its ruling. In the meantime, the GoG will be looking at implementing a biotech coexistence policy that simultaneously appeases the EU while making it virtually impossible to import or plant biotech products. In no case does it appear that the GoG is interested in accommodating biotech product in Greece.

Comment

15. (C) While Greece's recent decision to expand its ban from the original 17 MON810 varieties to 31 will most likely fall in the face of EU pressure, the use of the decision as a delaying tactic is almost certain to achieve its objective. Once the tactic of the ban has been overcome however, the challenge of testing GM seeds as well as actual planting in accordance with EU coexistence policies will also provide the GoG with ample opportunities to delay the penetration of biotech varieties into the Greek agricultural market.

16. (C) Greece leads the EU in percentage of population employed in the Agricultural sector (7%), and agricultural issues play a significant role in the political arena. In addition to the overall public perception of the dangers of GM product in terms of long term bio-diversity, Greek NGOs, including the Greenpeace chapter, continue to beat the drum loudly and often on the dangers of GM product in the Greek press, and their message is well received. Post has requested funding to address the education issue on GM seed product with the farmers and cooperatives in 2006. Post will also host a Science Fellow in 2006 who intends to study the effect that the extensive use of pesticides are having on the groundwater supply in the Thessalian plain. This research

may help make a more affirmative case for biotech varieties
in order to reduce pesticide use in the future. End Comment
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